

Intergenerational Transmission in a Bidirectional Context

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### Abstract

Traditional approaches to the study of parent-child relationships view intergenerational transmission as a top-down phenomenon in which parents transfer their values, beliefs, and practices to their children. Furthermore, the focus of these unidirectional approaches regarding children's internalization processes is on continuity or the transmission of similar values, beliefs, and practices from parents to children. Analogous unidirectional perspectives have also influenced the domain of family therapy. In this paper a cognitive-bidirectional and dialectical model of dynamics in parent-child relationships is discussed in which the focus is on continual creation of novel meanings and not just reproduction of old ones in the bidirectional transmission processes between parents and children. Parents and children are addressed as full and equally agents in their interdependent relationship, while these relational dynamics are embedded within culture. This cultural context complicates bidirectional transmission influences in the parent-child relationship as both parents and children are influenced by many other contexts. Further, current research in the domain of parent-child relationships and current concepts of intergenerational transmission in family therapy are reviewed from a bidirectional cognitive-dialectical perspective.

*Keywords: intergenerational transmission, Social Relational Theory, transgenerational family therapy*

### Intergenerational Transmission in a Bidirectional Context

The process by which the parents influence children is often described as intergenerational transmission. However, “transmission” is an inadequate and deterministic metaphor that inadequately captures the complexities of influence between the generations (Strauss, 1992). In this paper we approach intergenerational transmission as processes of internalization in the family, whereby beliefs, values, and practices that were initially external to one family member become incorporated in another family member’s thoughts, feelings, and behavior (Kuczynski, Marshall, & Schell, 1997). In particular, we focus on processes of internalization in the parent-child relationship.

Historically, prior to the 1980’s, research on processes of internalization in the parent-child relationship was dominated by a unidirectional approach in which only parents are seen as active agents, and children are regarded as passive recipients of parental influence (Maccoby, 2003). Internalization in the parent-child relationship was understood as a top-down phenomenon of intergenerational transmission, in which parents determined in a unidirectional and deterministic manner the socialization outcomes in children (Grusec, Goodnow, & Kuczynski, 2000). Children’s internalization of values, beliefs, and practices was conceived as the outcome of parenting. Moreover, the goal of these early unidirectional theories was to understand the intergenerational continuity of beliefs, values, and practices from parents to children (Corsaro, 1997). The principal research question concerned the process of intergenerational transmission of similarity between the generations, or how parents reproduced their beliefs, values, and practices in their children.

These theoretical understandings underwent a major revision as the unidirectional accounts on children’s internalization were criticized (Maccoby & Martin, 1983; Lollis & Kuczynski, 1997). Recent research in the domain of parent-child relationships commonly assumes a bidirectional perspective (Parke, 2002), stressing the co-occurrence of both

directions of influence – from parent to child and from child to parent – in a complex reciprocal system (Kuczynski, 2003). Due to the interdependent nature of family relationships (Cook, 2001), parents and children continuously influence each other's thoughts, feelings, and behaviors. Consequently, from a bidirectional perspective intergenerational transmission cannot be understood as a one-way phenomenon. On the contrary, bidirectionality implies that intergenerational transmission is by definition mutual as parents socialize their children and simultaneously children socialize their parents (De Mol & Buysse, 2008a). Within current research on bidirectionality in the parent-child relationship, two major approaches can be distinguished (Kuczynski & Parkin, 2007): on the one hand behavioral approaches that focus on behavioral exchanges during parent-child interactions, on the other hand cognitive-dialectical approaches that focus on processes of meaning construction in the parent-child relationship. In this paper intergenerational transmission and internalization are discussed from a cognitive-dialectical framework (Valsiner, Branco, & Dantas, 1997), and more specifically from the social relational theory (Kuczynski & De Mol, in press; Kuczynski & Parkin, 2007; Kuczynski, Pitman & Mitchell, 2009).

The basic principle of social relational theory is dialectics. Dialectics is a meta-theory about the inherent holistic and dynamic nature of all phenomena. A dialectical framework assumes that each system consists of opposing forces that constantly actively interact producing continuous qualitative change (Sameroff, 2009). Therefore, from a dialectical perspective continuity and similarity are not the expected outcomes of intergenerational transmission (Kuczynski & Knafo, in press). Parents and children do influence each other's beliefs, values, and practices but this does not take the form of passive transmission, rather it involves active construction by the recipient. Dialectics entails a nonlinear conception of causation, meaning that one relationship partner can never unilaterally impose change on the other. Processes of interpersonal influence are by definition dialectical, because the person

who exerts influence is dependent upon the other for the effect of his influence (De Mol & Buysse, 2008a).

Parents and children may have separate and opposing needs and goals, which lead to tensions conceptualized as conflict, ambivalence, ambiguity, and expectancy violations (Kuczynski, Pitman & Mitchell, 2009). Such tensions have the potential to create new meanings, in dialectical terms moments of synthesis, which can temporarily resolve the contradiction. These syntheses set the way for new contradictions and consequently qualitative change. Therefore, from a dialectical perspective intergenerational transmission includes generation of novelty and change of meanings. This perspective is consistent with Sameroff's (1975, 2009) transactional model of development, in which Sameroff states that changes in meaning are a key process in dialectical transformation: "The contradiction that has occurred consists between a meaning system which sees the child as an object to be manipulated, and one which sees the child as a center of needs and desires existing independently of the need and desires of his parents...The dialectical model would posit at each stage the contradictions with which the mother is faced in trying to understand her child" (Sameroff, 1975, p. 77).

Based upon social relational theory, the main idea we elaborate in the following parts is that intergenerational transmission between parents and children always involves construction of novel meaning and not just reproduction of old ones. In the first part we discuss central concepts of social relational theory that are important to understand the dialectical process of intergenerational transmission. In a next part research documenting intergenerational transmission from a cognitive-dialectical bidirectional framework is discussed. To conclude, current concepts of intergenerational transmission in family therapy are reviewed from a bidirectional cognitive-dialectical perspective.

### **Social Relational Theory**

Social relational theory (Kuczynski & De Mol, in press; Kuczynski & Parkin, 2007; Kuczynski, Pitman & Mitchell, 2009) is an integrative framework regarding dynamics in the parent-child relationship. Considering the dialectical nature of these dynamics and its implications for the study of intergenerational transmission, three core concepts of social relational theory are discussed: equal agency, relationship as context, and cultural embeddedness of parent-child relationships. Next, the concept of personal working models is explained to understand both similarity and change in intergenerational transmission.

### **Parents and children as equally agents**

Agency is a multifaceted construct (Bandura, 2006), referring to the human capacity to intentionally influence one's own functioning and life circumstances. From an agentic perspective people are fore-thinkers, with a capacity to visualize a future and building upon these forethoughts regulate their actions. Moreover, people as agents are self-examiners with a metacognitive capacity to reflect upon own thoughts and actions. The notion of agency has been applied on the parent-child relationship (Kuczynski, 2003). More specifically, Kuczynski focuses on the active dimension of both parents and children in the relationship, as they both as autonomous subjects have the capacity for initiating purposeful behavior to influence the other, and the ability to interpret and construct meanings out of these relational experiences. Moreover, a basic assumption in social relational theory is that parents and children are equally agents. In other words, both parents and children have to be considered as full agents in the relationship, including an agent-to-agent perspective in the bidirectional process of intergenerational transmission.

A main consequence of this assumption of equal agency is that parents cannot mold children, and children cannot mold parents, or that one person cannot influence the other in a way that the other becomes a person as wished and desired by person who exerts influence (Kuczynski & De Mol, in press). Although agency includes strategic action and both parents

and children use strategic behavior to influence the other in the relationship, strategic action can never unilaterally change the other person. From a social relational perspective change is a bidirectional phenomenon that happens on the relationship level. One agent can never impose his beliefs, values, and practices on the other agent because change includes change of both parent and child within a bidirectional process. Recognition of the equal agency of parents and children means that to obtain change parents and children are dependent upon each other.

The acknowledgment of the child's agency in the relationship has consequences for models about intergenerational transmission. Current transmission models of internalization favor a view of children as actively constructing their knowledge and values in a social context (Grusec & Goodnow, 1994; Kuczynski et al., 1997; Lawrence & Valsiner, 1993, 2003; Smetana, 2011). All products of internalization, even that of intergenerational similarity, must be constructed by children from the messages and reactions presented by their social context. Parents as agents are also active in packaging the message so that children can accurately interpret and accept the parent's perspective (Grusec & Goodnow, 1994). However, the constructive capacities of children places limits on parental influence. Both the interpretation and the acceptance of the message ultimately depend on the child's agency (Smetana, 2011). For example, children are inclined to accept some moral and conventional views of their parents, but disagree with their parents when they exclude persons on the basis of race or ethnicity (Killen, Lee-Kim, McGlothlin, & Stangor, 2002). Another example is found in children's values about hedonism, stimulation, self-direction, and achievement, which are known to be different from how their parents value these issues (Knafo & Schwartz, 2008).

In a similar vein, a perspective on parents as agents also respects their innovative and constructive capacities in processes of intergenerational transmission. Parents themselves



actively coped with transmissions in their own socialization history and consequently may wish to promote other values and beliefs in their children than those that they were exposed to within their family of origin. Moreover, parents' internalization products are subject to continuous evaluation and confrontation due to interactions with their children.

### **Relationship as context**

Two basic properties of the parent-child relationship in social relational theory are interdependence and time. Interdependence in parent-child relationships reflects the degree to which the behaviors, emotions, and thoughts of the parent and the child are mutually and causally interconnected (Kelley et al., 2002). In terms of human agency interdependence involves a continuous construction of meanings and emotions about the exchanges occurring in the relationship. Because of this continuous psychological and emotional investment in the relationship, parents' and children's responses matter to each other (Marshall & Lambert, 2006) what affects the way they respond to each other. Time concerns the time line of the parent-child relationship, including a past, a present, and a future. According to Hinde's theory (Hinde, 1997) two persons construct a relationship out of the history of their interactions, and subsequently this relationship becomes the context for future interactions. During their interactions parents and children continuously interpret each other's behaviors and create expectancies about the future, which are consolidated in representations of the relationship. These representations form the filter through which the behaviors during interactions are experienced and predictions are made about the future.

This perspective on the parent-child relationship as an interdependent long-term relationship with a past and a future has consequences for understanding of the nature of intergenerational transmission. The relationship context makes parents and children both receptive and vulnerable to each other's influence. Parents are important persons in children's life and are well placed to both constrain and enable children's internalization

processes. Within their social position as responsible for the child and as providers of attachment security, parents have more opportunities than other adults to influence their child. Parents also report that their values are influenced and changed through their children (Knafo & Galansky, 2008) and acknowledge the importance of the influence they receive from their children for their own personal development as adult (De Mol & Buysse, 2008a). This unique position simultaneously constrains the parent regarding values and beliefs she or he wants to transmit. For example, research indicates that parents tolerate their children's resistance or different points of view because they want to maintain a positive relationship with them and foster autonomy and assertiveness in them (Hastings & Grusec, 1998), acknowledging the agency of the child in the relationship. Parents impose rules and will try to transmit values and beliefs of which they think are important for their children, but not so far that the parent-child relationship would be destroyed or damaged in a serious way.

Also for children the relationship with their parents is both an enabling and constraining context for children's agency. Children describe the existential dimension of a sense of having an influence on their parents for their own identity development (De Mol & Buysse, 2008a) and clearly report that they derive this sense of influence from a mutually responsive parent-child relationship context (De Mol & Buysse, 2008b). On the other hand, relational constraint can be seen in adolescent's overt and covert resistance strategies such as negotiation and accommodation to parental rules while at the same time trying to pursue their own goals (Kuczynski & Parkin, 2007). This research indicates that children indeed resist parental rules and try to change parental values and beliefs, but not so far that it would contaminate the relationship as they want to stay engaged indicating that the relationship matter to them.

### **Cultural embeddedness of the parent-child relationship**

Social relational theory argues that processes of internalization in the parent-child relationships do not occur in isolation because influence does not stop at the borders of the relationship context. Relational dynamics are always embedded within a cultural context. Basic relationship theory (Hinde, 1997) stresses the reciprocal influences between the various levels of human complexity, that is, the individual, interaction, relationship, group, and socio-cultural structure. Each level has to be understood as context and meaning constructor for another level. Culture is a semiotic context (Valsiner, 2000) that provides meanings about values, beliefs, and practices that orientate humans in their social environments. However, because meanings in culture are constructed by humans during social interactions that, in turn, influence the individual and relational level, culture should not be viewed as a monolithic mass. Instead, culture includes diversity, difference and dialectics, because ambivalence, ambiguity and contradictions are inherent in humans' practices and the way humans approach and understand individual, relational, and social phenomena. These tensions are necessary conditions for development and change.

A defining feature of culture with great importance for the context of the parent-child relationship is the concept of generation (Kuczynski & Knafo, in press). Parents and their children belong to different generations as they are born in succeeding periods of historical time. Historical analysis suggests that social values change from one generation to another (Alwin, 1996). Due to many social and historical evolutions like economic changes and new technology parents and children are exposed to different values in their respective childhood. However, generations should not be perceived as harmonious eras characterized by consensus of opinions. Moreover, much research suggests the importance of peer culture for children's socialization processes (Corsaro, 1997). Parental influence on children's values is important in early childhood but becomes less exclusive in adolescence when children get in contact with many other influences. Generational differences between parents and children due to the

cultural embeddedness of their relationship, is another important factor in the study of the complexity of intergenerational transmission. Parents may wish to foster values and practices from their generation in their parenting, but are challenged not only by the influence and agency of their children but also by the influence of generational change of values and practices. Children may also wish to teach their parents contemporary issues or to give them insight in the constructive aspects of current values and practices, but are confronted with the complexities of their parents' own socialization process and the fact that their parents may be influenced by other contemporary value discourses. These inherent tensions between and within generations again demonstrate the dialectical and not linear nature of intergenerational transmission processes.

### **The concept of personal working models**

The concept of personal working models is proposed to understand how change and similarity can occur within a same process. Kuczynski and colleagues define internalization in a bidirectional perspective as a recursive process by which parents and children construct personal working models of values, beliefs, and practices in their relational environment and culture (Kuczynski et al., 1997; Kuczynski & Knafo, in press). The model refers to the outcome of emotional and cognitive processing that takes place when parents and children are trying to make sense of each other and their surrounding culture. Parents and children construct personal working models of their mutual relationship, of relationships with other family members, peers and other important persons, and also of culture. Personal working models become the framework through which the individual interprets and connects to his social world and simultaneously act upon it. Lawrence and Valsiner (1993, 2003) consider two parallel processes of internalization and externalization. Internalization is the emotional and cognitive processing that takes place as people evaluate and attempt to understand others and their culture based upon and in terms of their personal and relational needs, expectancies,

and beliefs. Externalization is the further processing that takes place as people act upon the meanings constructed via internalization. In this way, the construction of personal working models occurs at two levels. Messages and behavior of others and contents of culture are interpreted and transformed through internalization, and these meaning constructs are again interpreted and transformed for action through externalization.

Personal working models are “working” in the sense that the dynamical and constantly changing nature of the models. Parents’ and children’s values, beliefs and practices are continuously challenged in the history of their interactions and exchanges with their socio-cultural environment. The dialectical tensions in these interactions and exchanges create temporary syntheses through which it is possible for a person to remain connected to the other person and the socio-cultural world. The main consequence of a dialectical perspective on intergenerational transmission is that difference and not similarity is the outcome of socialization processes. Difference should not be understood as detachment, rather it should be considered as a generative dialectical tension. It is the difference that makes a difference (Bateson, 1979) meaning that difference connects people to others and their social environment, and not disperses or alienates them. However, the concept of synthesis does not reject the possibility that parents and children may internalize similar values, beliefs, or practices from each other in their working models but creative differences will exist because even similarity must be constructed. Synthesis focuses on the active dimension of a process of incorporation, meaning that parents and children as agents evaluate the appropriateness of messages for their own understanding or may wish to temporarily accept or accommodate the message for the sake of the relationship. In this way similarity also includes novelty and change.

### **The concept of accommodation**

The idea of synthesis has been used to re-conceptualize two classic conceptions of children's responses to socialization in a nondeterministic way. The concepts of accommodation and negotiation have been proposed as a dialectical replacement for compliance and noncompliance, respectively (Kuczynski & Hildebrandt, 1997). Research indicates that adolescents comply with parental requests taking their own perspectives in consideration, meaning that they accommodate to their parents by searching a synthesis between own perspectives and their wish to keep a relationship with their parents (Kuczynski & Parkin, 2007). Accommodation differs from classic concept of "compliance" because it does not imply an exact match between the parents' demand and the child's cooperative response. Negotiation refers to the process by which adolescents resist parental demands in a way that they take their parents into account. Accommodation and negotiation demonstrate that children may cooperate with parental values but not as passive recipients of parental influence. On the contrary, children act as active agents creating novelty: they reconstruct parental values in a novel way and may act in accordance with those values in a way that interjects the child's creative interpretation.

**The concept of personal working models of culture.**

Another example demonstrating the merging of change and similarity in novel dialectical synthesis regards research within a context of acculturation. Children's and parents' working models of culture can be very different due to immigration as well as changes in culture over time. Research demonstrates that children of immigrants develop values that are more similar to their nonimmigrant peers in comparison with those of their parents (Knafo & Schwartz, 2001). On the other hand, personal working models of parents and children may display similarities, which nevertheless incorporate novelty. Research indicates that children of immigrants maintain some vestigial values of their original culture that have little influence on their daily life (Knafo & Schwartz, 2008). These findings

demonstrate the dialectical nature of intergenerational transmission. Parents' and children's working models of culture are different because parents have greater exposure and loyalty to the culture of origin whereas the children have greater exposure and loyalty to the culture of settlement. Simultaneously children also internalize some values of their parental culture in their personal working models, but in a way that these parental values do not intensively influence their daily life, creating a synthesis or novelty that simultaneously include change and similarity.

### **Research Support**

In this section research documenting intergenerational transmission from a bidirectional cognitive-dialectical perspective is discussed. The objective is not to give a comprehensive review of the research that substantiates this approach, rather to give some examples that give clear insights in the nature of children's and parents' personal working models. Starting from a bidirectional perspective on the parent-child relationship, both children's and parents' perspectives are explained.

#### **Children's perspectives**

There is a growing body of research on children's influence in the parent-child relationship (Ambert, 2001; De Mol & Buysse, 2008a, 2008b; Dillon, 2002; Knafo & Galansky, 2008; Palkovitz et al., 2003). However, most research in this area still focuses on the perspectives of the parents and not of children. Acknowledging the full agency of children in parent-child relationship, two studies are discussed in which adolescents present their perspectives.

In a study focusing on the phenomenology of adolescents' influence on their parents (De Mol & Buysse, 2008a), the adolescents postulate that they teach their parents a lot about current evolutions in the world, but in particular that they have an influence on the personality development and inner life of their parents. For example, they describe how parents learn to

put experiences in perspective and learn to control their emotions and thoughts. Adolescents seem to derive this sense of influence from the responsiveness of their parents in the relationship rather than from parental compliance to children's direct demands. An interesting finding regarding the dialectical nature of intergenerational transmission is that adolescents explicitly state that they can only sense their influence when parents act upon their influence. Parents do not have to copy or comply, on the contrary, parents have to do something with the influence of their child so the adolescents can sense they are making a difference in the relationship. Value transmission from the child to the parent from the adolescents' perspective is not about passing on similar values to their parents. In this way, adolescents seem to resolve potential contradictions between their own and their parents' personal working models by making a clear distinction between agency and power. Adolescent's influence on their parents does not coincide with imposing values but reflects recognition of the parent's agency in the relationship.

A similar finding regarding the dialectical construction of adolescents' personal working models was found in a study regarding the perspectives of adolescents on their resistance in the parent-child relationship (Parkin & Kuczynski, 2012). Adolescents describe overt and covert resistance strategies that they use to deal with conflicting expectations. The most common overt strategies were arguing with the parents and ignoring them, while covert resistance implied many strategies like behaviorally complying but cognitively rejecting the parent's message. It is especially noteworthy that adolescents perceived parental demands and expectations as flexible and co-constructed in the history of the parent-child relationship. Within the parent-child relational context adolescents can act upon parental values constructing a working model that reflects simultaneously the autonomy of the adolescent and their motives to stay connected to the relationship.

### **Parents' perspectives**



Considerable research has focused on parental cognition exploring how parents manifest own beliefs and values in social interaction with their children (Grusec et al., 2000). The main conclusion is that for an optimal socialization parents have to take the child's agency into account to develop strategies that motivate the child to accept parental values. Other research focuses on the process by which parents reconstruct their own working models to make them more adaptive for their own and their children's well-being. Evidence for this process is found in research on identity formation indicating that the reconstruction of previous socialization models is positive for the own development (Kuczynski et al., 1997). For example, research using the adult attachment interview (Bretherton, Biringen, & Ridgeway, 1991) found that mothers in a non-clinical sample reject socialization values from their own history and prefer to raise their children with practices that are different from their own education.

Another area of research regards parents' perspectives on children's influence (Ambert, 2001; De Mol & Buysse, 2008a, 2008b; Dillon, 2002; Knafo & Galansky, 2008; Palkovitz et al., 2003). The main and recurring theme in this research concerns the massive and inevitable influence children have on the life and the personality development of the parents. Ambert (2001) describes 11 areas where children have positive as well as negative influences on parents: (1) parental health; (2) physical location and social position in society, including influence on the structure of their daily life; (3) parental employment; (4) financial situation of the family; (5) quality of couple and other family relations; (6) parents' repertoire of social and emotional experiences; (7) parents' participation in the community; (8) parents' mood and personality; (9) parents' attitudes, values, and beliefs; (10) parents' future life plans; (11) parents' feelings of control over their own lives. There is no question that children have an important influence on the values, beliefs, and practices of their parents. Moreover, parents also recognize the changing nature of children's influence on their own value system.

Regarding the nature of these intergenerational processes of influence, parents make a distinction between direct and indirect influence (Knafo & Galansky, 2008). Parents recognize children's direct strategies to obtain something or to change parents' opinions in a direct way. However, within a research context where parents could openly reflect upon their children's influence, parents stress the non-strategic dimension of children's influence and index this non-strategic dimension as most important and existential influence on their life and personality development (De Mol & Buysse, 2008a). Within daily life children offer parents continuously different perspectives that influence parents' working models in a dialectical manner so that novelty and change is created.

### **Implications for transgenerational family therapy**

The intergenerational transmission of family interactions, belief systems and processes has always been a major point of interest within the field of family therapy. This is in particular true for those family therapists, who are considered to fall into the category of transgenerational family therapy (Carr, 2000), including Bowen family systems therapy (Bowen, 1978), contextual therapy (Boszormenyi-Nagy & Krasner, 1987; Boszormenyi-Nagy & Spark, 1973), and more recently different attachment-based family and couple therapies (Byng-Hall, 1995; Greenberg & Johnson, 1988). Despite some differences, they all highlight the key role of formative early experiences in the family of origin in predisposing people to developing current life problems. Problems are seen as multi-generational phenomena caused by, for example, a lack of differentiation in the family of origin (Bowen, 1978), an imbalance of fairness within generations (Boszormenyi-Nagy & Krasner, 1987), unmet attachment needs for safety, security and satisfaction (Greenberg & Johnson, 1988), or being recruited in a specific family scripts (Byng-Hall, 1995).

Reviewing these family therapy models from a cognitive-dialectical framework, following critiques are formulated. In the first place, although these family therapy models

seem to recognize the active dimension of parents and children, the focus remains on the massive and deterministic influence of former generations with which next generations try to cope. The emphasis is not on the creation of novelty in each generation. Intergenerational content is viewed as transmission of information, not as opposing meanings in a dialectical process that enable opportunities for transactional development. For example, in his family scripts model Byng-Hall states, "Each parent has scenarios from childhood which if repeated in this generation can be called 'replicative scripts'. Some childhood experiences will have been uncomfortable and attempts may be made by the parents to avoid these with their own children. This choice of opposite style of parenting can be called 'corrective scripts'" (Byng-Hall, 1995, p. 9). The idea is that parents will automatically replicate scenarios from their childhood, and *may* do something when they had bad experiences. A third sort of script is called 'improvised script', when family members create scenarios which are distinctly different from those in the family of origin. However, the development of improvised scripts is only necessary when replicative and corrective scripts are inadequate to meet the needs of the family. Within this perspective creation of novelty only occurs when scripts of the former generation are insufficient. A cognitive-dialectical framework on the contrary assumes by definition creation of novelty in each generation due to humans' agency.

In addition, Byng-Hall states regarding the position of the child in processes of intergenerational transmission, "...the child... He or she learns how to anticipate other's people characteristic responses by observing how each reacts in family scenarios. ...The child eventually learns to be an actor on the stage and becomes capable of reflecting on the event and its meaning to both him or herself and others. ...This provides the basis for recognizing the script that he or she might be drawn into." (Byng-Hall, 1995, p. 27-28). Children, just like parents, may replicate or correct, and in exceptional circumstances improvise family scripts. Nevertheless they are primarily drawn as passive recipients into family scripts rather than

being an active co-author together with their parents, neglecting the full and equal agency of the child in the parent-child relationship. Similar non-agentic and linear ideas can be found in the contextual theory of Boszormenyi-Nagy (Boszormenyi-Nagy & Krasner, 1987). The theory states that if adults were neglected by their parents, they are entitled to be neglectful in relationships with their children because they did not receive care themselves and behaving otherwise would be disloyal to their parents. Indeed, it is assumed that children are entitled to receive more than they give to their parents (on their turn receiving the children's loyalty), but the ledger is balanced when they as adults in turn give more to their own children than they receive (Carr, 2000). Consequently, children are automatically by birth or adoption participants into the family ledger with debits and credits. There seems to be little room in current transgenerational family therapy models for bidirectionality and in particular for the agency of the child in the relationship.

Another critique concerns the negation of the influence of culture and societal generational change in transgenerational family therapy models. These models seem to assume that intergenerational transmissions are private family events in which influence only flows from one generation to another generation in a unidirectional and restricted way. Taking all critiques into consideration, transgenerational family therapy may profit from current bidirectional and dialectical models on intergenerational transmission, in particular for developing new therapeutic interventions. Family therapists can be inspired by ideas such as dialectical influence instead of linear determination, bidirectional transmitting instead of top-down determining, multiple social influences instead of unique parental influence, and agency instead of passive receipt.

### **Conclusion**

The central idea is that intergenerational transmission in the parent-child relationship is a bidirectional and dialectical process, influenced by various contexts, in which constantly

novel meanings are constructed and not just old ones are reproduced. This perspective on intergenerational transmission has implications for research on parent-child relationships and current transgenerational family therapy models. Parent-child relationships research might profit from a perspective on parents and children as full and equally agents who influence each other in a dialectical way constantly producing transactional change. Family therapy might profit from a perspective on persons as agents influenced by many contexts, and not just passive conveyors or recipients of contents.

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